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MOCA TUCSON NAMES JULIO CÉSAR MORALES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & CO-CHIEF CURATOR AND LAURA COPELIN DEPUTY DIRECTOR & CO-CHIEF CURATOR



Julio César Morales. Photo: Rembrandt Quinallo



Laura Copelin. Photo: Randi Malkin Steinberger

Tucson, AZ – The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Tucson is excited to announce a new leadership team. Following a rigorous, year-long search process, Julio César Morales will join the museum as Executive Director and Co-Chief Curator, beginning December 1, 2022, with Laura Copelin assuming a new role within the organization as Deputy Director and Co-Chief Curator.

Morales and Copelin will collaborate closely with long-time MOCA Finance Director Carrie Hess, staff, and trustees to advance MOCA's mission: to inspire new ways of thinking through the cultivation, interpretation, and exhibition of contemporary art.

Morales most recently served as Senior Curator at the Arizona State University (ASU) Art Museum in Tempe, Arizona, and brings more than two decades of experience as an arts professional and practicing artist to MOCA Tucson. Previous museum and gallery experience includes work as Adjunct Curator for visual arts at Yerba Buena Center for The Arts in San Francisco (2008-2012), and as Founder and Director of Queens Nails Annex, an artist-run project space in San Francisco (2003-2012). In 2013, he was a contributing curator for the Japanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale and has curated more than 100 exhibitions to date.

In his work with individual artists and exhibiting venues, on curatorial projects and commissioned works, Morales has cultivated significant support from major philanthropic

institutions, including, but not limited to: The Rockefeller Foundation, National Endowment for The Arts, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Jumex Foundation, and the Diane and Bruce Halle Foundation. As a practicing artist, Morales works across a range of media and visual strategies to explore issues of migration, underground economies, and labor on personal and global scales. His work has been exhibited internationally at venues that include the Lyon Biennale (France), Istanbul Biennale (Turkey), and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, among many others.

Copelin, in her new position, will solidify the roles she has played at MOCA as Interim Director and Curator-at-Large over the past three years. In her time at MOCA, Copelin has advanced important institutional, academic, and community partnerships; secured key operational and programmatic funding; and developed an arc of exhibitions that facilitated new commissions from 26 artists and counting. Copelin previously served as Executive Director and Curator at Ballroom Marfa, where she worked for over seven years, and prior to that was Assistant Curator at the Santa Monica Museum of Art.

During her tenure at MOCA, Copelin has realized numerous banner projects, including *were-: Nenetech Forms*, a group exhibition centered around migration and adaptation in the Sonoran Desert, co-conceptualized with artists rafa esparza and Timo Fahler; *Grace Rosario Perkins: The Relevance of Your Data*, featuring large-scale commissions and intimate collaborations for the artist's first museum exhibition; and the forthcoming *Cecilia Vicuña: Sonoran Quipu*, which realizes two new works from the internationally celebrated artist and poet—one of Vicuña's signature monumental quipu installations and an artist book that has been in progress for more than 30 years.

The collaboration between Morales and Copelin experiments with new ways small museums can function both organizationally and as responsive agents within their communities, serving as a locus for consequential projects with international reach.

MOCA Board President Kira Dixon-Weinstein says, "I'm thrilled to welcome Julio César Morales to MOCA. Julio's vision and experience—demonstrated by his work as a curator, artist and cultural leader—brings so much vitality to MOCA, and will help us continue to serve artists and audiences. His understanding of the art world in Arizona and internationally adds a new, deeply relevant perspective to the museum. Alongside Laura—who continues to build momentum, stability, and increase resources for artists at MOCA—their collective vision for shared leadership and the museum's future opens an exciting new chapter for MOCA."

Miki Garcia, ASU Art Museum Director, added, "While it is a huge loss for the ASU Art Museum, we are thrilled to hear about Julio's appointment as Executive Director of MOCA Tucson, where he will be able to exercise his unparalleled skills of working with living artists and connecting with community. Julio has made a lasting impression on the history of ASU Art Museum, and we are so proud to celebrate the next phase in his professional journey."

Central to Morales and Copelin’s vision will be artist-centered programming that engages conversations in Tucson, the region, and internationally.

“As artists and cultural stewards, Julio and Laura have shown their commitment to enriching the field of art through thought provoking exhibitions and salient conversations, and they are staunch supporters of artists—their visions and processes,” said Los Angeles-based artist rafa esparza, “Their collaborative leadership and curatorial envisioning for the museum will usher in an era of possibility that will be a hallmark of MOCA Tucson for years to come.”

Rita Gonzalez, Terri and Michael Smooke Curator and Department Head of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, added, “Julio brings enormous energy and commitment to his parallel lives as artist and educator. He has always engaged with the specificity of site—the local—while engaging with the cultural and political aspects of the border and transcultural spaces. Those interests will no doubt continue to shape his new role at MOCA Tucson.”

The search and hiring committees, composed of MOCA trustees and community partners, included: Michael Bradford, MOCA Trustee; Kira Dixon-Weinstein, MOCA Board President; M. Jenea Sanchez, Artist; David Taylor, Professor, School of Art, University of Arizona & MOCA Trustee; Danny Vinik, MOCA Board Vice President; and gloria j. wilson, Associate Professor, School of Art, University of Arizona. The search process was conducted with a mind to position MOCA for future growth and vital partnerships with the local community, peer exhibition venues, and collaborators in education.

Artist M. Jenea Sanchez reflected, “It was an honor to serve on the search committee and participate in a process that saw numerous highly qualified curators, arts administrators, and thought leaders take an interest in the position. I am deeply proud that Julio César Morales said yes to the call and I’m excited for his leadership and the unique perspective he will bring to the job as an artist, educator, and fronterizo.

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For more information please contact Audrey Molloy at: audrey@moca-tucson.org.

About MOCA Tucson

MOCA Tucson inspires new ways of thinking through the cultivation, exhibition, and interpretation of contemporary art. Established by artists in 1997, MOCA is Tucson’s only museum devoted to local and global contemporary art. Housed in a repurposed firehouse, MOCA maintains a full schedule of exhibitions, public programs, and arts education offerings. Now in its 25th year, the Museum cultivates critical dialogue between artists and audiences about today’s world; supports artists through the production and presentation of new, experimental work; and educates the artists and audiences of tomorrow.